

-TITLE-HELENA FINKELSTEIN  
-I\_DATE-  
-SOURCE-FORT WAYNE JEWISH FEDERATION  
-RESTRICTIONS-  
-SOUND\_QUALITY-EXCELLENT  
-IMAGE\_QUALITY-EXCELLENT  
-DURATION-  
-LANGUAGES-  
-KEY\_SEGMENT-  
-GEOGRAPHIC\_NAME-  
-PERSONAL\_NAME-  
-CORPORATE\_NAME-  
-KEY\_WORDS-  
-NOTES-  
-CONTENTS-  
CHILDHOOD-1939-1944

1:01:00 Helena was born in October 1925, in Stanislawów in southern Poland. She had one sister named Emily. Her father was a physician and her mother was a nurse. She remembers her childhood as being an exceptional time for her.

1:03:55 Helena describes life in the small town where many of her relatives lived with whom she celebrated the holidays. She went to the mountains with her immediate family for vacations and it was after one of these trips in September 1939, that she heard about the disturbances of war on the radio and in newspapers.

1:07:45 Russians come into town and began to take over. She describes how the Russians were brutal to townsfolk but left her physician father alone because he was very useful. Some family members were deported to Russia never to be heard from again. Helena remembers still being quite untouched during the Russian occupation until June of 1941 when the Gestapo contacted a Jewish federation of intelligentsia within the city.

1:10:00 The intelligentsia were taken away after Russians left to p&d and her father returned with white hair because of the dreadful news. Word spread quickly in the community of impending troubles so people began burying valuables. Her family buried gold and jewelry in the house of a patient the father was caring for. She describes going back and looking for valuables after the war.

1:11:20 Helena recalls everyone of the Jewish townspeople being placed in the Ghetto where each family had 1 room in a 4 to 5 room apartment. Living conditions were very difficult and everyone was tense. The Ghetto was separated from the rest of the town by gates and fences.

1:13:10 Helena states that in October on the Sunday of Shana Raka (ph) 10,000 people were rounded up by Jewish police and the Nazis and killed. She describes the Jewish police.

1:15:10 People were collected in the plaza of the city with guns and dogs. Her father and her family were not taken because they had medical training. Jews were forced to dig mass graves outside the city, climb in, and were shot. Some survived and some died not only from bullets but also from suffocation.

1:18:30 The SS men present were eating and drinking, as killings were taking place. Helena remembers the head of the operation, Captain Kreiser (ph) riding a white horse and telling everyone present that it was 5:00 and those waiting to be killed could leave. People on the brink of death were free to go back to Ghetto. Helena went with her father to work in a laboratory every day along with the mother. Emily had to stay home, and escaped the death groups. She describes other aspects of Ghetto life; black market, sickness..etc.

1:20:30 Gestapo came and took people away everyday and Helena never knew which group would come back and which wouldn't. Her aunt was taken away and never heard from again. The aunt's son was left with Helena's family until the last extermination. The Ghetto lasted from June 1941 - February 1943.

1:23:00 Helena's boyfriend wanted her to leave with him after he received Christian papers as an Irishman. Her father had organized to get the family smuggled into Hungary but Helena could not go with them. She had to spend the night at the house of an engineer and meet them at the train station the next morning. That morning Helena's family was taken away and killed.

1:25:45 Helena couldn't take the train so the people decided to keep her at the house. They loved her as they had no natural children and treated her exceptionally well. When she thinks about it, she believes her family killed themselves with cyanide pills which the father had given them in case they were caught. For the most part she did not think about the tragedies, but went to church with her foster parents. She was extremely confused about herself and wore both a cross and "Moses" around her neck.

1:28:00 Russians were coming and the Germans in the town wanted to move into private housing. Her foster parents defied the Germans as long as possible but eventually had to succumb. They decided to hide her.

1:31:10 From March 1944 - August 1944, Helena was forced to sleep in a shed in the garden behind the house. Helena thinks its a miracle she survived but she lived by eating when they brought her food and never moving from the grave they had dug for her in the shed. She cannot remember what it is she did to survive mentally but she survived.

1:32:00 Helena changes subject after stating that she couldn't walk when she was let out of the shed due to muscular atrophy.

1:35:00 Other Polish escapees lived in a bunker under a townperson's house. There were thirty Jewish people who lived in the bunker where they could move around. When let out of the shed she was taken to the hospital where she was treated and where she met a dentist who also was in the bunker. They took her there and at 19 met her husband.

1:37:00 Her husband then began working for a Russian company in town after the liberation and she describes her living in an apartment with him.

1:40:00 The Russian's suspected her brother-in-law of wrong - doings so she and her husband and her brother-in-law leave for Friebourg (ph). The three of them have Christian papers and live as Christians in the town.

1:43:45 Helena recalls trying to contact her family in the states, primarily a cousin who worked for a General McClay (ph) who worked in the American embassy in Warsaw. She was contacted in her Christian name and she left everything behind to go to N renberg then to Berlin, and then to Munich at the end of 1946. In Munich, she, her husband, and his brother inscribed their names in the displaced persons books and found work.

1:45:00 Helena states she becomes pregnant while living in Munich with husband and his brother.

1:47:50 Helena then contacts her father's brother in New York who is trying to get her to the U.S. but cannot obtain a visa. Helena describes her going to Paris to get a visa to South America first, before going to the U.S. and tells of her daughter's birth in Paris. French government helps her tremendously with food and clothing for her baby. In July they leave for Colombia.

1:51:00 The four of them live in boarding house of old Jewish German woman who sells the boarding house to her. Her husband became manager of a store and she describes her second pregnancy, their movement upward in society, and her daughters growing up.

1:54:30 Helena talks about how much it bothers her, the ignorance of people, concerning the Holocaust and thinks it should be taught.

2:03:00 Interviewer returns to experience of the shed and the grave. Helena describes her return to animal nature and how she didn't think. She describes instance of claustrophobia.

2:04:20 She tells story of how her uncle did not want her boyfriend, who wrote her a letter, to come in contact with her after all those years because she is now happily married.

2:07:50 She tells another story of a cousin who before the war wanted to marry a lower class gentleman but the father dissented. After the war and other circumstances they were reunited.

2:11:00 Helena is redirected to talk about her move from Colombia to U.S. Her husband tells her to leave Colombia if he dies. She moved after he died waiting two months for a green card.

2:13:10 She describes how she worries about her grand-children growing up in small towns without a Jewish Community.

2:16:00 Helena describes the injustice she felt when moved from the foster parents into the bunker. She says she can't understand the hatred of people.

2:18:15 Says she hopes it will not happen again, reiterating what such a horrible set of circumstances does to a person, causing them to do nothing but survive.

2:24:45 Helena talks about her feelings for the Holocaust survivors who had to endure Saddam Hussein's attack on Israel. She then describes a killing of a baby in Ghetto, reiterating Ghetto situations. Tells story of how a German officer saved her life because of her beauty as a young child.

2:27:00 She talks on how she likes her life as an American.  
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